

TRANSCRIPT

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

Subcommittee

Inquiry into fire season preparedness

Wodonga — 20 July 2016

Members

Mr David Davis — Chair

Mr Daniel Young

Ms Harriet Shing — Deputy Chair

Participating Members

Mr Greg Barber

Mr Adem Somyurek

Mr Simon Ramsay

Staff

Acting secretary: Mr Richard Willis

Research assistant: Ms Annemarie Burt

Witness

Mr Ian Jack.

The CHAIR — That brings to a close our formal witnesses, but we generally have an open session for very brief — 2-minute — contributions. If there is anyone from our audience who wants to make a contribution, this is an opportunity to make a contribution on the record. If you would like to come forward, Sir, and give us your name, address and position, if you have one.

Mr JACK — Thank, you, Chair. My name is Ian Jack. My wife and I run a farm in the Indigo Valley at the high end of the Rutherglen wine region. The property abuts the national park — the Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park— for a distance of about 6 kilometres. For about half of that distance it abuts the reference area that is within the park. On the day of the fire we left the property — —

The CHAIR — Which year was that? Which fire?

Mr JACK — It was the 2015 fire — 20 December 2015. We left the property under advice. It was just after that I thought that the best opportunity for the reduction of any further damage from later fires would be the fuel reduction to lower the risk of fires, and really that is when the issues came to the fore. It was not so much from the damage of the fire; it was the aftermath of the fire in dealing with the issues in trying to reduce the risk.

I have submitted just today my submission to this inquiry, and I would like the opportunity to fully explain some of the rationale behind the recommendations or the suggestions I have made about fuel reduction or fire suppressant tactics. I have heard some of the comments from both municipalities in the rural areas — from Indigo and Alpine — and I have addressed some of those issues in my submission. But the one glaring one that I felt was not addressed at all was the difficulty in getting fuel reduction exemptions for native clearing. It is a legislation issue. It just makes it very difficult for both the implementers of Parks staff, DELWP staff, CFA staff and the abutting owners of the park.

The CHAIR — This is the reverse of the coordination issue where sometimes DELWP and others are needing to look at the landscape in an integrated way but looking at private land. But you are looking from private land towards the park. Is that what you are saying?

Mr JACK — It is actually a two-way thing because I do not know where the fire is going to come from — from either our property onto the park or, in this particular instance, from the park onto our property.

The issues that sort of stemmed from this situation include the challenge of trying to get the clearing done where bush abuts bush. I noted that within the path of the fire it split some distance, only on the next property to the north of us, and it seemed to go around a lucerne patch — well, a bit more than a lucerne patch; it was a paddock of lucerne. That led me to believe that perhaps that was an opportunity for me to clear some distance, maybe what was recommended in the 2009 royal commission, where there was either a 50-metre buffer zone or clearance of 50 metres or to the height of a tree, and then in that area I could plant some lucerne, which would appear to be a fire retardant. So part of my suggestions in my submission are to investigate the possibility of these fire retardants, either plantings or —

The CHAIR — Zones.

Mr JACK — zones. I would really like the opportunity to express, as I said, the rationale behind my suggestions at another meeting after you have read the submissions and to be on the proactive side of fire prevention rather than dealing with it after the fire.

We have suffered some consequential damage from the first lot of rain that came down, being adjacent to the reference area, which has not been burnt, from what I can estimate, for at least 50 or 60 years. There was a build-up of materials up to waist height, and then after the first rain it entered our property. I have got about 6000 cubic metres of debris in a dam that I cannot access. It is just a horrendous situation.

The CHAIR — We have got a copy of that. We have just received it by email today. So we will accept that if the committee is happy. I am not sure if there are others who want to make a contribution, but certainly there will be opportunities in Melbourne, admittedly.

Mr JACK — Yes, that is right.

The CHAIR — That is fine. We will perhaps find a time in Melbourne for a further contribution.

Mr JACK — Very good.

The CHAIR — Thank you for today.

Witness withdrew.